

PIPES-AND POPS!!

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FOR rather more than a year I have followed with amazement the effort of organists to kill the organ as an instrument, however much they may be under the impression that they are prolonging its life. May I be allowed to say some words which, though possibly controversial, are sincere.

Ever since I can remember I have loved the instrument unreservedly, and I am doing all I can to preserve it. Maybe all of us would do better to take a practical look at the future, rather than looking nostalgically over our shoulders at the past. These words are a plea for commonsense to prevail and introduce some sense of proportion into our view of 'things organic'. I wonder whether this is a pious hope?

Broadly speaking I would divide organs into the classes religious and entertainment. In the former are all church, cathedral, chapel and some concert instruments, characterised by draw stops on the console, non-extension, non-enclosure and so on, though there is some overlapping of course. In the entertainment category are theatre and cinema organs and home, club and pub instruments as well as many oth-

er types. These are characterised by stop tabs and 'horseshoe' consoles, unification, instrumental voicing, total enclosure etc. Electronic and electric organs fall in both categories.

In the modern world—and for goodness sake, let us look at the modern world, not the world of even ten years ago, a good pipe organ is bound to cost from 5,000 to 40,000 pounds according to size and complexity, and the equivalent electric organ much less, relatively. Let us think for a moment what this means, regarding the potential market for the pipe organ in either religious or entertainment categories. The pipe theatre organ as such, is dead and there is now no demand at all for them in cinemas. How many churches will be able to install any but the very smallest pipe organ, and how many civic communities will spend that amount of the taxpayer's money on it? I would say, not many. A minority of people now go to church and people rarely go to the Town Hall for their entertainment. What is likely to be the result?

The population of organ builders in the future, and their craftsmen, is going to

shrink. With the best will in the world we can do little to prevent this. A few will go on building organs and carrying out repair and maintenance work on existing ones. More will enter the electronic field and 'improve the breed' as many have already done, such as Compton and Wurlitzer—and some, though we hope very few, will take up other professions.

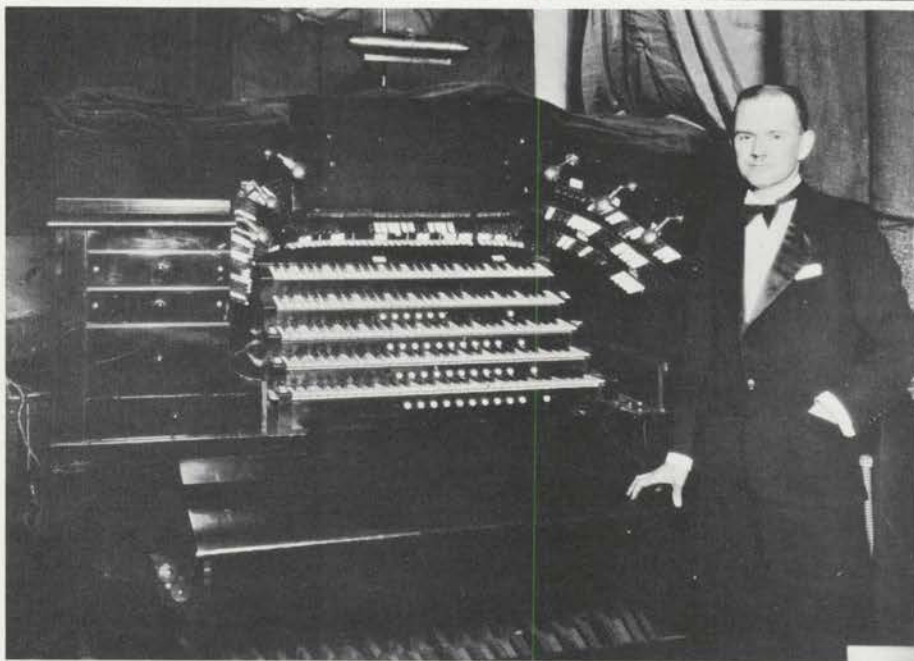
In the future therefore, there will be little demand for pipe organs, if only on grounds of first cost, and the fact has to be faced that many of them are now becoming beyond repair.

The Theatre Organ Club, Cinema Organ Society and Theatre Organ Preservation Society are doing a really splendid job of rescuing organs from the breaker's yard and the scrap heap and reviving them to play again. They renovate them not only to playing order, but to first-class order, for example at Buckingham, Ossett, Andover and Windsor. In each of these places pipe organs have been installed where none existed before FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE PUBLIC. More important still, they are doing all they can to interest the public in the instrument and to train future organists to play them under first-class instructors and musicians. And the public is responding, membership is constantly increasing and many concerts have almost a capacity attendance. This proves that public interest in the instrument is not only not dead, but very much alive and increasing, thanks to the efforts of the all-too-few enthusiasts.

The thought occurs to me that as in the entertainment world, so in the Church—why should not these interested in the organ do the same, led by the organist and/or the vicar? They could indeed rescue many an organ from total ruin. Some would say it is technically not possible. I would say that technically it most certainly IS possible, as these Clubs have already proved. The layman is often an engineer, cabinet maker, electrician, plumber or just enthusiast who can pick up the rudiments of restoration in a surprisingly short time. Properly led he can do a good job and, more important, without harming the instrument. In any case he has little to lose if it is otherwise destined for scrap. So often little more than thorough cleaning and re-leathering is required, and both can be dealt with it just depends on how much you really want to do it.

So far, so good, and I am sure few organists would disagree; where they do disagree, they are divided into the same categories as their instruments, but there is little or no overlapping! Unfortunately the venom directed by organists against their fellows appears to be entirely one-sided. It comes from the one place it should not come from—the church. My own experience with organist friends in both camps

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Leonard H. Clark at the console of the 5 manual Robert Morton, circa 1926.

This organ at the Kinema (later renamed Criterion) on Grand Avenue at 7th, Los Angeles, was originally 3 manuals when installed about 1918, and located in two chambers on the left side in front of the proscenium. In 1921 a solo organ in a third chamber above the other two was added, all on high pressure; also a four rank echo organ in the balcony center rear and this 5 manual console.

Other organists featured here over the years were Earl Abel, Irma Falvey, Eddie Horton, Chauncey Haines, Jr., Herb Kern, Ann Leaf, etc.

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has proved this to be true. Many and varied are the sneers I have heard directed against the 'Vox Humana', 'Bells and Drums' 'Sinking to the Infernal Regions', 'Fruit Jellies', and so on. Never once have I heard this kind of sneering directed by a theatre organist against his church counterpart. Is there a moral somewhere? And do the sneers really bear inspection?

Whether we like it or not does not alter the fact that Hope-Jones revolutionised the church organ as much as the theatre. Electric and electro-pneumatic action, tab stops, double-touch, orchestral voicing, total enclosure are all largely due to him, but were devised mainly for the theatre. Yet such appears to be the hatred of organists for one of the greatest benefactors the organ has ever known, that one is almost led to believe it is a crime to install a horseshoe console in a church. And one is treated to the farcical sight of seeing the country's leading organists playing one of the country's leading and most recently-installed instruments with someone standing beside him, not to turn the pages, but to draw the top stops which are out of his reach! To cap it, I am told that the mechanism of the draw stop costs about 1 more per stop than the tab—on an instrument which is already falling by the wayside on account of first cost. To what heights can the folly of prejudice reach?

We read too, that every effort MUST be made to voice the modern instrument exactly as the baroque or romantic organs of the past. Yet this is not the past. Beau-

tiful these organs were, and are, but life advances and no two of the old instruments were the same—why try to achieve the impossible. If we do this, we can only judge an instrument by how much it is like another one, not on its own merits. What a disappointing comparison. By this yardstick we should be designing organs with hand blowing, crude design and no swell boxes—even the gas engine would be suspect! One asks oneself, which way is progress?

One of the main attractions of the organ is that no two instruments are exactly the same. To say that any particular composer wrote for one particular organ is obviously rubbish. No two organs he knew himself sounded the same. Beauty the old instruments had and modern ones have, but if we ever succeed in copying the old instruments exactly, we shall achieve nothing but mass-production and will kill the instrument on those grounds alone. Frankly it depresses me to read of a new instrument being hailed as a good copy of one built around the turn of the century. Fortunately the nature of the beast is such that it cannot exactly copy its predecessor.

The great composers were progressive men—which was a measure of their greatness—Bach was obviously a do-it-yourself type as well! Each of them realised that the organ, and its music, cannot stand still, cannot rely on its past glory. Each of them wrote for the modern day and modern life as he knew it, and each was successful through appealing to a MODERN audience—the audience of his day. Whatever the motives stated in print, each composer wrote for the pleasure of hearing his work performed—in other words, for the same reasons as artists through the ages to the present day. In a religious age, when much of the work was commissioned for the church, it would be politic to write it for the 'Glory of God'. But the Almighty would still have to put up with what pleased the composer's ear most—such is the nature of things.

So we have to accept—and why should we not—that the great composers wrote modern music for the modern age. They wrote music which they intended to be popular with the public they aimed it at, and they hoped it would bring in the cash as well. This may state it rather baldly but it is a fact if we are honest enough to admit it. I am sure the composers would do so, as most people of such stature in the arts are also very human people—they have to be, to be sensitive to their public.

In his own way each of the great composers was an innovator or inventor, and I feel sure that Bach and the rest would have accepted the innovations of Hope-Jones and turned them to excellent account to further their own efforts. To what standards might the organ not have de-

veloped with the genius of a Hope-Jones allied to that of a Bach? I make no apology for mentioning both men in the same breath. Both advanced the organ immeasurably in his way, and both were forward-looking. But unfortunately nobody of the stature of a Bach was in evidence to encourage Hope-Jones and he had to turn to the entertainment world. The wheel went full circle and in spite of every kind of discouragement, Hope-Jones improved ALL kinds of organs. Yet we still try to stifle progress.

Turning to the electric organ, whether or not we like it is largely immaterial at the present time. The fact remains that it is an exciting instrument which is here to stay—and it will prolong the life of the organ indefinitely. It is in fact helping greatly to re-create the popularity of the instrument in all its many forms.

This instrument is still in its infancy, but those of us who can look back and remember the gruesome noises made by pre-war models can realise just how far the thing has progressed in a very short time. We have newspaper arguments as to whether or not so-and-so can tell in every case which is playing, pipes or electric. Whatever the answer may be, the problem proves one thing conclusively—the electric organ has progressed so much that some people cannot be sure all the time that it is not pipes, and find it hard to differentiate under some conditions. Give it another few years and even people with a really experienced ear will find it difficult—or impossible to tell the difference.

In the future, therefore, the electric organ is going to replace pipes. More important it will sound exactly like pipes. Manufacturers like Compton, Wurlitzer and Baldwin are well on the way to this already. So before long the electric model will be capable of replacing pipes completely in most locations, and of performing any kind of works, classical or otherwise. Would Bach and the rest have ignored such an instrument, which has all the makings of a musical adventure—worse still, would they have tried to 'knock' it? Of course they would not. They would have been quick to realize its potentialities and to use them for their own ends—just as organists ought to be doing now, and some indeed, are.

But in general, what do we find? Letters to the Press decrying it because—well, because it IS NOT a pipe organ. Letters proclaiming 'OF COURSE I can tell the difference'. And the Royal College of Organists, to the best of my knowledge, (though I am open to correction and hope I am wrong), ignoring its existence altogether—(Hope-Jones was not exactly encouraged).

I would say that the latter body should by now be taking the electric organ to its heart, working with it, using it, shouting it

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from the house tops. If the instrument can 'deliver the goods', what difference whether it is driven by electricity, air, steam or nuclear energy? And make no mistake, the electric organ will be capable of delivering the goods in no uncertain manner, alongside its piped forbear, before long.

As for declining audiences at recitals, the attitude of many organists appears to be 'the public ought to like us'. WHY, for goodness sake? If we turn out an indifferent performance, or give music above the heads of the man in the street, why should we expect him to come back for more. If we expect that, we are insulting his intelligence. Conversely, how many church organists would go to more than one concert at which nothing but 'beat' music was played?—the same argument is valid.

If we want the public to listen to the organ we must do several things. We must make the public welcome; *really* welcome, not just tolerated, we must give the best possible performance and we must play what the public wants to hear. After all, nobody will waste time listening to what he does not want to hear, though the truth of this has not apparently struck some of us. Only if we do this will the man in the street educate himself to higher standards of musical listening. Yet organ recitals do not always provide the fare he needs.

Put yourself in the place of someone walking into a strange church to hear a recital. You walk into a large and solemn building, dimly lit and austere, where you are completely ignored. You may, or may not find a leaflet giving the programme—a succession of titles and numbers interspersed with exhortations more suitable to a funeral than enjoyment. They may be titles to a beautiful piece of music, but they look pretty cold unadorned in print. Unless you know the composer and are a lover of music already, this would almost put you off before the show begins. You start to feel part of the congregation and forget all about enjoying yourself.

The performer may, or may not appear in person. He then disappears from the face of the earth and the music begins when you aren't quite ready for it. It may or may not be above your head, according to the performer and the individual, but at the conclusion, well, you just walk out! The organist has disappeared, the console is invisible (even in our post-war churches this applies), and you might as well have been listening to a tape recording. You cannot help having a vague feeling of having been somewhat let down. Unless you are a great lover of such music or a very keen churchgoer, you won't go to the next one!

The size of audiences tends to bear this out. I submit that a church organ recital

can be made a most enjoyable event, just as easily as one in a cinema, with no disrespect to the object of the building. Perhaps the description of a similar recital, or concert in a cinema will prove this.

At a Theatre Organ Club or Cinema Organ Society concert, the thing is always well attended and many people have travelled many miles to be present. They are often held at inconvenient times—like over lunch time on Sunday, due to house (theatre) opening times, yet the people still come along. So you go along with a bar of chocolate instead of lunch. You go in and have a look around the building and can, if you wish, view the console in the pit.

Just before the show starts, the M.C. appears and you sit anywhere you like. The M.C. then welcomes you and explains any points of interest in the building, the programme and so on, ending by introducing the organist, who then starts to play and crises into view. He remains in full view all the time he is playing. At the conclusion of his first piece or signature tune, he faces his audience and greets them and introduces the next piece, with any necessary explanations—and proceeds to give of his best.

Now not all the organists are top-notch players yet, though the majority of them are, but they have one thing in common—they 'hold' their audience the whole way through. They demonstrate the organ and play music the audience likes and can understand—anything from Bach or Elgar to Dusty Springfield and the Beatles, and careful arrangement of the programme ensures that there is something to suit most peoples' taste, whether classical or popular. In other words, the organist takes trouble to make the listeners enjoy themselves, not just to show off his own virtuosity. Do people like being treated as adults in this way, or do they prefer the more usual attitude in church recitals of being 'talked down' to? The attendances give the answer. And which of the two types of performance will attract the listeners? Yet the cinema performance is no less and no more religious than the church one.

The choice of music will vary according to the location, but is there any valid reason why tuneful light music should not be performed in church? Please do not imagine that I think the Beattles music need be performed at every church recital, but there is plenty of tuneful, catchy classical music. An entire recital of classical music by the lesser-known masters is all very well if your audience is composed of musical people, but in most instances this is unlikely to be the case.

Why should not the public be treated to contact with the organist—if he is worth hearing, he is worth seeing as well. In the

T.O.C. concerts the console lights are left on at the end of the show, to encourage the public to look at it and be interested in it. An organist who shuts the console and disappears home before his public has got out of its seat has only done half a performance. He loses nothing by personal contact and he gains much, as theatre managers were quick to realize. They put the organist on a lift and spotlighted him, but not for fun!

Again I hope nobody will take this out of context. I do NOT advocate using spotlights at church recitals, though it might not be a bad thing at that! And by all means let us have the great works played, but give people something to hum on the way home as well. The object of the thing is to make people enjoy hearing the music—in other words, to give them a good time, and there is nothing irreligious in that. If you do not do so, they won't come again and they will probably stay in bed on Sunday morning as well.

Finally, what about each of us doing a little more to further the cause of the organ, whether classical or entertainment, pipe or electric. For it is not an instrument we should keep to ourselves. I have an electric organ, and am an extremely bad player, kind though some of my friends are in their comments. But I can and do ask those friends who can play, to do so for the benefit of others—people like to be asked to come along and hear someone play if he is reasonably good. Sometimes the player is a church organist, sometimes a theatre one. Sometimes we can have a 'jam' session and everyone can have a go.

I have noticed that people who are subjected to this 'softening up' process suddenly become aware of the organ as an instrument, where they did not even think about it before. Why?—because it is fun as well. And music *should* be fun, unless it is specially composed for a solemn occasion. So instead of bemoaning vanished instruments and vanishing audiences, what about doing something ourselves to bring them back again! They will come back and I am sure that we are on the verge of a great revival of interest in the organ. It seems as if, once again, the entertainment people are setting the pace; and jolly good luck to them! It cannot be just coincidence that the Swingle Singers rendering of Bach became a best seller for modern youth. Let the rest of us do our bit, too.

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